

ARTICLE APPEARED
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21 October 1985**CURRENTS IN THE NEWS****Could Philippines
Go the Way of Iran?**

High-level warnings that the Philippines may be headed for an anti-American upheaval sent a chill through Congress, quickening concern about the future of two vital U.S. military bases there.

STAT Both the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency told legislators in secret briefings during early October that President Ferdinand Marcos is losing his tight grip—and only drastic reform could halt a plunge toward economic and political chaos amid a fast-spreading Communist rebellion.

Representative Dave McCurdy (D-Okla.), a member of the House Intelligence and Armed Services committees, said the findings of the intelligence community and his own independent inquiry point "toward catastrophe with a growing Communist insurgency, declining economic growth, a deeper intransigence by Marcos."

What most worried U.S. officials was that the downfall of the autocratic Marcos could bring to power an anti-American regime that might scrap the U.S.-Philippines bases agreement and force the closing of Clark Air Base and Subic Bay Naval Base, the largest overseas American installations. The bases are



Subic Bay, the Philippines: Main support base for U.S. Seventh Fleet ships and planes.

linchpins of U.S. strategy in the Pacific and have taken on even more importance in the face of the Soviet Union's expanding military presence in Asia.

Before the latest alarms, U.S. officials had expressed anxiety about the security of the bases in light of the increased battlefield successes of the New People's Army, the guerrilla arm of the outlawed Communist Party.

A Senate investigator told the Pentagon in September that the bases were poorly protected and vulnerable to attacks by the rebels. The Defense Department plans to spend more than 1 billion dollars to upgrade the two bases despite the possibility that the installations will be lost.

Pentagon officials acknowledge that jitters over the bases have triggered a search for alternatives. Leading contenders: Guam or Tinian in the northern Marianas, both some 1,500 miles east of the Philippines.

Yet the massive cost of building new bases—up to 8 billion dollars—plus their less strategic position make Subic and Clark almost irreplaceable.

Against that backdrop, some congressional leaders argue that the U.S. must soon come to grips with the deteriorating conditions in the Philippines, where Marcos has ruled for 19 years. Said McCurdy: "The last thing we need is a Nicaragua or Iran situation in the Philippines." □